



U.S. Department of the Interior

Bureau of Land Management

Miles City Field Office

111 Garryowen Road

Miles City, Montana 59301



January 17, 2002

Dear Reader:

Enclosed for your review is the *Montana Statewide Draft Oil and Gas Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) and Amendment of the Powder River and Billings Resource Management Plans (RMPs)*. The document was prepared jointly by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), and the State of Montana, Board of Oil and Gas Conservation and the Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ). The Bureau of Indian Affairs, Crow Tribe, Department of Energy and the Environmental Protection Agency are designated Cooperators in the EIS.

In the document, the word "State" refers to the appropriate State of Montana agency(s). State agencies have different jurisdictions, so the term "State" is used generically. For example, "State" can mean the Department of Natural Resources and Conservation, or Fish, Wildlife and Parks.

We anticipate the Final EIS being available to the public in the Summer of 2002. Studies to gather resource information are ongoing and planned to continue for the next three years. Several studies will be finalized during the EIS process.

- A 3D groundwater model of the Hanging Woman Area. The Draft EIS includes a 2D groundwater model for the planning area. The 3D model will demonstrate how such modeling falls within the parameters of the 2D Model.
- Air modeling for Montana is underway and will be available for the Final EIS.
- An Ethnographic Study to help determine areas or sites the tribes consider sacred was initiated in 2001 and will be available for the Final EIS.
- The Northern Cheyenne and Crow tribes have been asked to provide BLM "Narrative Reports" that describe their resources. If they agree and the information is available in the Spring of 2002, it will be incorporated into the Final EIS.

Other studies, upon becoming available, will be used to monitor and maintain the decisions made in the document. Ongoing studies not yet included in the EIS are:

- A Hyperspectral Assessment to determine potential for natural gas will be available the Fall of 2002.
- A Fluvial Geomorphology Study to help determine impacts to stream channels from water erosion will be available the Fall of 2002.
- A Soils Study being conducted with the BLM Wyoming office will be available the Spring of 2003.
- A Wetland Filtration Study being done by the Montana State University, Bozeman, is anticipated to be completed in the year 2004.
- And finally, a Flora/Fauna Study will begin this year with no schedule as of this writing.

The Draft was prepared by developing alternative management strategies to help resolve issues identified during Scoping. The EIS analyzes the environmental consequences of five alternatives, including the BLM/State Preferred Alternative (Alternative E).

The Summary found in front of the document briefly describes the issues and alternatives found later in detail.

Chapter 1 contains the legal authority mandating the writing of this document, the purpose and need for the analysis and its application. The planning area is defined, a general location map provided, lands not analyzed are described, and the plan's conformance to the BLM RMPs is discussed. There is a brief discussion on concerns raised during scoping. The "Planning Criteria" that helped guide the preparation of the Draft are provided in Chapter 1.

Chapter 2 discusses the five alternatives and the rationale for alternatives considered but not analyzed in detail. Management Common to All Alternatives is discussed first, then the management actions specific to each alternative are given. Table 2-2 in Chapter 2 compares the five alternative specific management actions.

Chapter 3 describes the existing environment. Each resource or topic is listed alphabetically.

Chapter 4 analyzes the impacts predicted to occur from each of the alternatives described in Chapter 2. The chapter includes Assumptions for the Analysis. Assumptions are predictions made by specialists based on their knowledge, education and experience. The Reasonable Foreseeable Development Scenario makes predictions for development, including for areas outside the planning area, so that cumulative impacts may be analyzed. For example, although the Indian Reservations are not part of the planning area, the number of wells that could possibly occur there are analyzed as part of the cumulative analysis. Chapter 4 describes the impacts from management common to all alternatives and impacts from each alternative by resource. The conclusion describes cumulative impacts, unavoidable adverse impacts, irreversible or irretrievable impacts, and short-term impacts vs long-term productivity. A comparative Summary of Impacts table is included at the end of Chapter 4.

The Draft EIS does not set water quality standards. The Montana DEQ held public meetings in December to begin the process of setting standards. If standards are set in a timely manner, they will be incorporated into the Final EIS.

Chapter 5 contains a listing of the personnel involved in preparing the document, and the public who participated through scoping meetings and letters.

The appendixes are in alphabetical order by resource. They contain material too detailed and analytical for the general discussion in the chapters. The appendixes were used to help develop the analysis described in the body of the document. The Monitoring Appendix gives general oil and gas monitoring guidance for resources or programs. More specific guidance, for example, a more detailed monitoring plan for wildlife, will be included in the Final EIS. The Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation Technical Advisory Committee also included a draft monitoring plan that can be found at the end of the Monitoring Appendix.

The Glossary is a list of definitions of technical terms used in the document; the Bibliography cites the references in the document; and the Index is a listing of words and topics and their location within the Draft EIS.

You are encouraged to comment on the entire document. A 90-day comment period will begin the day the Draft document is filed by EPA in the *Federal Register* (anticipated February 15, 2001). Written comments will be accepted and responded to in the Final EIS if received within the 90-day comment period. Please direct your comments to one of the following and the comment will be shared with the other parties.

Tom Richmond
 Project Leader, Board of Oil and Gas Conservation
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 Billings, Montana 59102

Greg Hallsten
 Project Leader, Department of Environmental Quality
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 Helena, Montana 59620-0901

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 Project Leader, Bureau of Land Management
 111 Garryowen Road
 Miles City, Montana 59301

The public hearings to answer questions and gather comments concerning this document will be held at the following locations:

Helena
 Crow Agency
 Broadus

Billings
 Lame Deer

The comments received on the Draft will be given equal consideration in the preparation of the Final EIS and Proposed RMP Amendment (Final). In the Final, you will be able to evaluate the Agencies' responses to comments regarding the Draft EIS. The State will hold a public hearing to discuss the State's proposed decisions in the Final. A 30-day protest period will be held for the BLM proposed decisions in the Final.

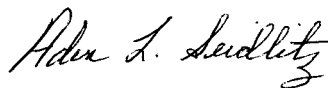
Sincerely,



Jan P. Sensibaugh
 Montana Department of Environmental Quality



Tom Richmond
 Montana Board of Oil and Gas Conservation



Aden L. Seidlitz
 Bureau of Land Management

DRAFT
STATEWIDE OIL & GAS
ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT
AND
AMENDMENT OF THE POWDER RIVER AND BILLINGS
RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PLANS

U.S. Department of the Interior
and
State of Montana

2002

Recommended by: Sandra S. Brooks 1/17/02
Sandra S. Brooks, Billings Field Manager Date

Recommended by: David McIlroy 1/16/02
David McIlroy, Miles City Field Manager Date

Recommended by: Jan P. Sensibaugh 1/10/02
Jan P. Sensibaugh, Director, MT DEQ Date

Recommended by: Thomas P. Richmond 1/15/02
Thomas P. Richmond, Administrator, BOGC Date

Approved by: Dave Ballard 1-15-02
Dave Ballard, Chairman, BOGC Date

Approved by: Mat Millenbach 1/17/02
Mat Millenbach, State Director, Montana BLM Date